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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 311.] FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 15, 1894. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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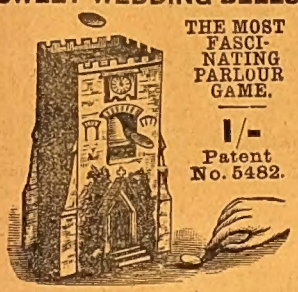

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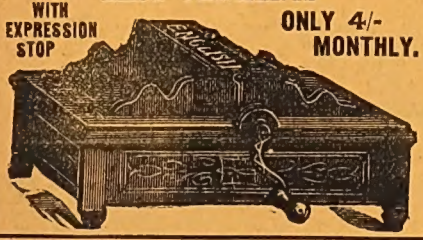

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 311.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 15, 1894.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

BLACK MINTY

THE who told the story was a beautiful lady, with eyes blacker and softer than those of any antelope, and she began in a low, musical voice, almost as though she were speaking to herself, while all her party, sitting outside the Métropole at Brighton, bent forward eagerly to listen.

"When I was a girl, and lived with Uncle William in America on his plantation in Old Virginia, I used to read in the Northern papers that Southern masters were cruel to their slaves, and laugh. So far as I knew, masters and mistresses were very kind to their people, and for their own sakes never hurt them so as to impair their value. Uncle William never did, nor Aunt Laura.

"They were an idle, good-natured, soft-voiced couple, who never took the trouble to be angry, and who agreed in everything—particularly in averring that 'niggers' were necessary evils, who must be taken care of, and were a great expense and torment.

"Once or twice I knew the overseer had whipped Dick, or Sam, or Ned—refractory field-hands who either shammed illness or were impertinent—but that was no more to be thought of twice than the wise flogging of a dog or horse for its own good. And, when a few were sold, it was natural the rest should not like it. As a general thing, uncle bought, rather than sold. He liked to keep his servants about him, and had a host of old, helpless creatures to support, who certainly never did anything but cut up wood or nurse the black babies.

"He was called a 'kind massa,' for I have heard the slaves so speak of him a hundred times, and, I suppose, never fancied that he did not do more than his duty to those beneath his care.

"The house servants were legion, and the one among them whom I liked best and remembered longest was old Aunt Jennie. She was black as ink, and her kinky wool was snow-white. On her head she always wore a tall, bright-coloured 'kerchief,' and in her ears two great hoops of gold—a present from my aunt. Her province was to cook, and such corn-bread was never made as that of old Aunt Jennie. She was mistress of her art, and proud of it beyond everything in the world, except her daughter.

She was a bright mulatto.

"That daughter was three years older than myself, and waited on my aunt. She was a bright mulatto, and as handsome as anyone with a taint of negro blood could be. She had a singular disposition. We should have called her proud had she been a white lady; as it was, she earned the title 'sulky.' Whatever she felt she kept to herself, and even when ill hid the fact as long as possible. Once she fainted while braiding my aunt's hair, without having let us guess how weak and ill she was.

"I liked Minty. She was handy at my toilet, and could do things daintily and quickly; and with a girl's instinct, I suppose, I found out first that Colonel Garronne's man Ned was her chief favourite. On holidays he used to come and see her, and afterwards she would be all smiles and blushes; and once, when I asked her who gave her a bright blue handkerchief she wore about her neck, she answered:

"'The colonel's Ned, Miss.'

"On plantations in slavery days many a slave had a wife who lived miles away, and whom he only saw now and then, and I made up my mind Ned was going to marry Minty. About that time dreams of weddings and bridegrooms may have been oftener in my head, because I had just met the only gentleman I had ever much admired in my life. My uncle did not favour him, but my aunt admired his fair bright face and tender blue eyes, and told me in a whisper that we would make a pretty couple. And, pretty or not, we were going to like each other very well.

"Every day told me that, and at last I owned to myself that when he asked for my heart I could not say no. So after a long winter passed, for the most part, in each other's company, I found myself one day with my hand in his, and, though I had not said one word, he bent over me and whispered:

"'My own for ever!'

"We were betrothed, and, though my uncle was not pleased, he gave his consent, for nothing could be said against Mr. Lathrope.

"Those were happy days, and it is not to be wondered that I grew selfishly wrapped up in my own hopes, and took little notice of others, especially when those others were slaves.

"I fancy Minty had been 'sulking' a good while, when I suddenly discovered her want of spirits, and asked old Jennie what ailed her.

"'Pears like Ned's massa don't let him come no more,' said Jennie. 'Some says he's soldiering. I dunno; we don't see nuffin' ob him.'

"If anything could have touched me just then, it was the picture of two lovers parted from each other. I made inquiries. Ned was sold—miles away. I did not tell Minty. What was the use? But every day Minty grew quieter, and crept about more like a ghost.

"My aunt complained, and declared she was tired of sulks. I interfered.

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Kneeling before me to beg my pardon.

"'Aunty,' I said, 'Minty's sweetheart has been sold; she feels that terribly.'

"'Ah!' said aunt, 'so she's sulking about Ned—that's her excuse! Why, there are plenty of other men. Mercy! you don't fancy these yellow girls are like us?'

"That night she took Minty to task, and advised her to fix her heart on a certain Bill on our own plantation. Then the girl's eyes flashed, and she spoke up. My aunt said she had never heard such impertinence from a nigger, and seemed quite alarmed.

"Minty was sent back to the kitchen in disgrace, and my aunt had a whispered conference with my uncle. I heard her say:

"'I agree at last; she's done it herself. I am afraid of her in her tantrums.'

"I might have guessed the truth from those words—and from what followed.

. . . . . .

"In the moonlight—the beautiful moonlight of Virginia—I stood upon the porch waiting for Mr. Lathrope, when a coarse laugh from my uncle's study startled me, and in a moment he came out, accompanied by a neighbour of ours—a vulgar brute, whose money was his only recommendation.

"I shrank to one side to avoid him, and, as they passed, heard through the tangled creepers that concealed me a brief conversation.

"'It's a bargain,' said my uncle. 'She's worth double the sum, Mr. Evans.'

"'I don't know about that,' said the other. 'But she's a likely gal; I don't begrudge her price.'

"And then they said good-night and parted.

"I knew a slave had been sold, but never guessed which one, or why.

"My wedding day was fast approaching. A white robe and veil lay ready, and my uncle and aunt were going to the nearest city on business connected with that time.

"I knew this, and knew that Minty was also to go with my aunt—that was usual—and I saw them leave the door without suspicion.

"The carriage did not return until dusk; then, as I sat in the parlour reading, I heard it roll up, and soon my uncle's voice, in unusually cheerful tones, rang through the house. Before I could go to meet them, both he and my aunt came in.

"My uncle held a small parcel in his hand, and sat down opposite me, laughing.

"'Guess what this is, and you shall have it,' he said.

"My aunt laughed.

"'No, she never can.'

"'I'm not good at guessing, uncle,' said I; and he answered:

"'There, don't tease her, wife. Look, Puss,' and before me lay a casket, in which glittered a splendid set of diamond ornaments.

"'Your wedding present,' said he; 'we don't want your lover to take you quite a beggar.'

"'Oh! how good—how kind,' I said. 'They are lovely! Diamonds have always been my ambition; these are fit for a queen!' and I flashed them in the light.

"Our hands were all together over the casket, when, sudden as a flash of lightning a great black hand came down on the table between us, and an almost unearthly voice cried:

"'Massa, whar's Minty?'

"My aunt spoke quickly:

"'All safe, Jennie; what a fidget you are!'

"Jennie did not seem to hear her. She spoke again:

"'Massa, whar's my Minty?'

"'It's no use, wife,' said my uncle, 'she's bound to know sometime. Don't take on, Jennie, and I'll give you a new gown. Minty is sold—close by—to neighbour Evans. I needed money.'

"'Money! For dem?' asked Jennie, pointing to the diamonds.

"'Well, yes, for them,' replied uncle.

"And then quiet, pious old Jennie, from whose lips we had never heard an evil word in all our lives, went down upon her knees and cursed us all in such awful language, she made my blood run cold with horror. My aunt fainted, and my uncle rang for the men. They carried the old woman off, still cursing us, and left her, as they said, to 'sleep it off.'

"My heart was as heavy as lead. I hated the diamonds; they seemed to burn my hand when I touched them. The old woman's words rang in my ears, and it was hours before I slept.

"When I did slumber I dreamed fearful dreams, and from one of them started awake with terror.

"The light was out, but the rays of the moon fell through the window on the floor, and over it, snakelike, crept a figure.

"I thought I was dreaming again. It seemed too frightful to be true. But in a moment I felt, as well as saw, old Jennie standing there with a long knife in her hand. Her hand was on my throat, her eyes glittered on me, the knife descended, but at that juncture I caught her wrist. She struggled, but was too old to match my young strength.

"I took the knife from her, flung it through the window, and stood over her as she grovelled on the floor.

I spread the money before her.

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"'Jennie,' said I, 'did you intend to murder me? What have I ever done to you?'

"'You sold my chile for dem shiney stones,' said she. 'I hates you; I wishes you was dead. You'd ha' been if you hadn't woke. Sold my gal to dat white brute. Lord! I wisht you was dead!'

"'Jennie,' said I, 'it was not my fault. I knew no more than you. I had rather never have a jewel than have them bought so. Do you know, while I lay awake I was thinking of poor Minty?'

"The old woman lifted her head.

"''Pears like young missus speaks de trufe,' she said.

"'I do, Jennie.'

"'Lord bress you den; but cuss massa all de same! Oh! my purty Minty—she hates dat brute so!'

"'Jennie,' said I, 'you know I could have you punished.'

"'Yes, missee.'

"'But I will not. Be quiet and respectful to my aunt, and I will promise you that Minty shall be bought back.'

"'Oh, missee!—Lord bress missee! only massa won't.'

"'I know it, Jennie; but *I* will.'

"'Oh! when, missee—when?'

"'To-morrow.'

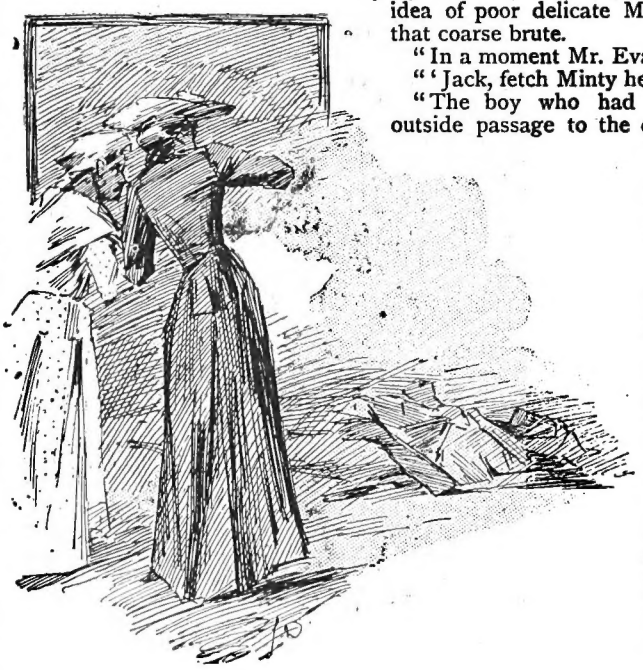
"So, kneeling first before me to beg my pardon, she crept out of the room, and I, locking my door, slept until morning.

"At daylight I rose, and taking my diamonds and a valuable watch, dressed myself for a journey, and started towards the nearest town. I knew a wealthy old jeweller in that place, and to him I went at once, offering my jewels for sale, with the remark that the money could be spent in more useful things.

"Diamonds were his hobby; he bought those without demur, and the watch, as he said, to please me. I returned to our home with a little fortune in my purse, which I grasped all the way with both hands, as though all the world knew its contents.

"I called Jennie into my room, and spread the money before her.

"'Look!' said I; 'I have sold those diamonds, and now I am going to buy Minty back. She will be all my own, and no one will have a right to sell her, for I shall give her her freedom. Are you sorry you tried to kill me, Jennie?'



"Jennie sobbed and prayed for me, and helped me with her trembling hands to attire myself in my riding habit; then she followed me to the door, and watche ' me as I rode away. Half an hour after I saw her creeping along by Mr. Evans' garden-gate, trying to hide from me as I dismounted.

"'Jennie,' I said, 'you ought not to be here. It can do you no good.'

"'I knows it, missee,' said Jennie, 'but please let me stay here until she comes. 'Pears like I'll go crazy.'

"I could not deny her, and without another word rode up to the door.

"'Mr. Evans in?' I asked the boy who opened it, and he answered in the affirmative. After a short absence he returned, and our neighbour followed him.

"His brutal face was flushed, his eyes were bright with rage. He could hardly command himself sufficiently to address me politely. But he made an effort.

"'Good day, Miss Thurston. Happy to see you.'

"'I'm glad of that,' said I, coquettishly, 'for I've come to ask you a favour.

"'Indeed,' said he; 'most happy to oblige you, I'm sure.'

"He waited.

"I smiled on him—the only way with this man was flattery.

"'No lady ever found Mr. Evans anything but gallant,' I said. 'I want to buy Minty back; she's my maid, you know, and no one else can do my hair.'

"The man's face turned almost black with rage. But for the fact that even a brutal South American never uses an oath in a woman's presence, he would have burst into a volley of execrations.

"At last he found voice for decent language, and said:

"'What you want of such a sulky nigger I don't know, but I'll sell her back and welcome. She's had three trouncings for impudence since she came, and I locked her up an hour ago in the cellar. You can have her back at the price I gave.'

"My heart leaped with joy. I asked the sum, and counted out the money. While he gathered it up, I caught sight of old Jennie's face among the bushes, and nodded 'Yes.' I saw her black hands clasped in prayer, and felt very thankful. It was only by an effort, however, that I kept down my wrath at the idea of poor delicate Minty quivering under the lash of that coarse brute.

"In a moment Mr. Evans called:

"'Jack, fetch Minty here.'

"The boy who had opened the door went by an outside passage to the cellar, and called, 'Minty! hello, Minty!' twenty times.

"'Won't answer, massa,' he said, coming back, with a queer sort of expression on his face; 'sulky, I reckon.'

"'Sulky, eh? We'll see,' said Mr. Evans, as he strode towards the cellar, the black following.

"He vanished a momen from my sight; then came an exclamation of horror from the man, and a yell from the boy.

"'Oh, missus!—she's gone done it!' said a slave woman who was at work in the garden. 'Oh, poor soul! she's gone done it!' and she clasped her hands and burst into tears. One moment both stood petrified. Then we rushed toward the spot whence the cries had come, and were within the cellar.

"I heard Mr. Evans cry:

"'Keep the lady back; it's no sight for her.' He then took a step forward, but it was too late. I had had one glimpse of an awful object lying on the floor, with a knife in its dead hand. I heard the woman scream:

"'Poor Minty's cut her throat!'

"Then I saw the face of old Jennie at the door. After that I knew no more for many hours.

"By the time I was well enough to mingle once more with the family circle, I had passed too near the gates of death to be blamed for any act I had committed.

"The diamonds were never mentioned by either my uncle or my aunt. They told me only that poor Minty lay at rest in the churchyard, and that her black mother happily slept beside her.

"But I never forgot the scene; and years afterwards, when I was a happy wife in England, I rejoiced when the glad tidings reached me that the evils of slavery had been for ever abolished."

When she finished, a dead silence reigned over the little circle of listeners. Then they quietly dispersed, leaving the beautiful lady, looking far out over the sea, alone with her thoughts.

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PIERRE

—o—

THE burning sun of the Canadian summer was beating down upon the rock on which was perched the fortress-city of Quebec. The steep, narrow streets lay white and deserted beneath its heat, and from the river its light was reflected in a silvery glare. Even the lilies over the chateau hung drooping and lifeless. Particularly the sunlight fell through the high, curtainless windows of the Laval Seminary, where, in a large bare room, were gathered the children of the town. Father François was teaching them.

The father was tall and thin. His high, small forehead overhung his worn face, of which every feature marked the ascetic; every line and furrow told of self-conquest. He had come to the Canadas dreaming of Iroquois martyr-fires. He was fulfilling the will of his superiors in teaching the children of Quebec their *Aves* and *Paternosters;* yet he did not complain. It was but another thorn in the crown; the cross could not be far beyond, and he was patient.

On this day, however, he found his task terrible. The children were restless, almost umanageable. At last the crisis came; the fierce spirit within him was stirred and he started to his feet, his eyes blazing, his lips trembling with the words which anger would not let him utter. The children gazed on their master in fear, waiting for what would follow. The words came at last, but they were only:

"Ah, well, *mes enfants*, let us repeat our exercise. Now!"

The brown fingers were clasped, the little heads were bowed, and the shrill quavering treble of the children mingled with the firmer tones of the priest. Then there was a rush and a tumult. Father François waited only for the lame child who went out after the others to disappear before he should throw himself on his knees, when he saw one boy still sitting in his place.

"Come, Pierre, we are free," said the father, but the boy did not move. He sat with his chin resting upon his hands, and did not even look up. The father approached him, and laid his hand kindly upon his head.

"What is it, little Pierre?"

The child roused himself, and turned his face up to the priest's.

"Father François," he said timidly, "what does it all mean, the exercises and the *Ave?* Why do we say them? Why do we call upon the blood of Christ and the Passion of Christ?"

"Ah! my little one," interrupted the father, "I cannot tell thee now. Some day, perhaps——"

Then as he saw the boy's puzzled face, he pushed back the chestnut locks from the open forehead, and looked long into the boy's eyes turned up to his own. Beautiful eyes they were, brown and clear and deep, shaded by long lashes. The priest saw something there which he had not seen before, something which made him look more attentively and murmur to himself. Then, as the boy trembled beneath his gaze, he started and said:

"Yes, little Pierre, thou shalt know all some day, for thou must be a priest."

"A priest," repeated the boy doubtfully. Then he rose. When he had reached the door he turned and saw the father's eyes still upon him. He made his bow.

"Good-day, Père François," he said gravely.

Pierre shut the door behind him, and was hurrying after the others, when he felt a light touch on his hand.

"Ah!" said he, "you here, Blanchette?" his troubled look changing into a smile. The children took hold of hands and ran down the hill, kicking the pebbles on before them. When they reached Dame Jupont's cottage, they separated, and Pierre went on alone.

"A priest," he thought again, "yes, I should like that, to live in the Seminary with Father François. But then," he added, "Blanchette could not come, and I love Blanchette."

. . . . . .

The short, hot Canadian summer was over, and the cool, pleasant autumn was slowly fading into winter. One day, Pierre went out into the forest. There was a tall pine which he knew, head and shoulders above its brethren. Slowly he wormed his way up the smooth, straight trunk, and then swung himself lightly from branch to branch, higher and higher, until even Quebec lay far beneath. All about stretched the woods.

That forest ocean which girt like an island the little world which he knew—what a strange fascination it had for every Canadian boy! Scarcely a season passed but some of them, listening to its call, forgot all, defied the laws of the governor and the curses of the bishop, and went forth to live their wild, roving life beneath its shadow. That fascination which made rovers of his comrades was upon Pierre as he sat in his watch tower. Some day, he, too, would break the feeble bond of Canadian civilisation, and go out into the forest with Jacques Hertel or Nicholas Marsalet, or some other famous outlaw.

He would penetrate to the depths of the great wilderness and behold its mysteries for himself—the lakes, rivers, mountains and cataracts which it concealed. He would fill his canoe with beaver and marten skins, and return, floating down the great river, to purchase pardon of the priests, and deck Blanchette with presents.

Suddenly, he heard a voice calling his name, "Pierre, Pierre." He looked down and saw Father François far below him. He scrambled to the ground in haste, and took the priest's hand, and they went on together. When they were near Pierre's home, his mother came running out with a small bundle.

"There, my little one, are your clothes. Be good, and mind Father François."

She kissed him, and with a curtsey to the priest disappeared in the house. She was a good mother and loved Pierre, but she had eight others to labour for. Food was scarce, and the winters were hard in Canada, and, as the good fathers had offered to take Pierre, he must go. So Pierre went on with Father François to the Seminary.

The years rolled by. Pierre grew to be a tall, handsome youth, who, for his strength, was appointed to bear the sacred image of Christ in the processions. As he passed along amid the crowds of kneeling and praying worshippers, he sometimes saw Blanchette.

"Ah! but she is beautiful," he thought.

Still the years passed. Pierre was a priest now, bound by his three vows, and looking forward to a great mission in the future. Every missionary who returned to the Seminary kindled his zeal. To explore new regions and gaze first upon their wonders, to preach to the Indians and win new empires for Christ; to die, silent and heroic, by cold or hunger, by tomahawk or fire; these were the dreams that coursed through the brain of the young priest.

One day Pierre received a summons from the Father Superior of the Seminary. A band of Algonquins living near Lake Nipissing had come begging that a missionary be sent them, and the choice had fallen upon Pierre. The young priest's cheeks flushed, his eyes glittered, the blood tingled in his

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veins, but he suppressed his excitement and asked respectfully when he should depart.

"Of that we will warn thee," replied the Superior. "Meanwhile do thou diligently prepare thyself for thy mission."

Then, as the venerable father waved a blessing, Pierre withdrew to throw himself on the stone floor of the cell in a transport of joy and enthusiasm.

The Indians at Lake Nipissing spoke a mixture of Huron and Algonquin. To learn this dialect was Pierre's first duty. There was an old Huron who came often to the Seminary to bring game and poultry. To him Pierre turned, eagerly availing himself of his visits to pick up a few words and phrases.

The Huron gave him what help he could, but at best it was hard work translating the lofty hymns and prayers of the breviary into the perversities of an Indian tongue. Perhaps Pierre would have become weary but for the encouragement of Father François. The father was feeble now, but he seemed to renew his youth in sharing the hopes of Pierre.

"Ah! my son," he would say, "thou shalt go forth to the heathen, perhaps to martyrdom. And in that last glorious hour bethink thee of François, who longed for it himself likewise, many, many weary years, but was not found worthy."

Despite his increasing infirmity, Father François continued to perform his regular duties. Among them he was accustomed each week to go for an afternoon into the cathedral of Nôtre Dame to hear the confessions of the faithful and absolve the penitent.

At last one day he found himself unable to leave his cell, and reluctantly sent Pierre in his place. The cathedral was a bare, rude structure, but it seemed noble and glorious in the eyes of the simple Canadian priest. He walked about softly through the chancel into which the light fell in coloured squares from the great painted window.

He paused a moment before the sad-eyed Virgin, and, falling upon his knees between the lighted candles, murmured:

"Holy Mary, Mother of Mercies, pray for us poor sinners, now, and in the hour of death."

Then he went on to the narrow confessional box, above which was written the name of Father François. There was a bench within, on which he might sit, and a shelf to lean upon, which brought his ear near to a small opening, through which came sounds of confession and penitence, and through which he uttered words of rebuke or pardon.

The light from above fell upon his head with a soft radiance. Never had Pierre so felt the height and holiness of his priestly office. He sat long after his last penitent had departed, pondering and praying. At last the dim light warned him that the short winter afternoon was far gone.

He rose, but just then he heard soft, hurrying footsteps. Although the prescribed time was long past he could not endure that one soul should bear for another day the load of unshriven sin. He sank again on his seat. A gentle, musical voice pronounced the words:

"I, a poor, sinful creature, acknowledge before God and you, a priest, standing in the place of God——"

The gentle voice faltered. Instead of the hackneyed formula, came a despairing cry:

"Holy father, thou knowest my sin. I have fasted and prayed——oh! I have tried to pray, but I cannot. When I kneel before the Blessed Mother and gaze into her face, I see only him. I went yesterday to the shrine of St. Anne and knelt there, but, when I looked up at the great white Christ, they were his eyes that were upon me. Holy father, what must I do? I cannot wed another, I cannot give him up. I love him so——"

The words ceased, as if choked in utterance, and there was only the sound of a woman sobbing and gasping.

At the first tones Pierre had become pale and cold. He recognised the voice. It was Blanchette's. Then, as the words came faster, he felt himself turned to stone. He knew as if by instinct that it was of him she spoke. After she had ceased, he stood long in silence leaning against the wall for support, his hands clenched so that the nails cut red arcs in his palms. He repeated to himself again and again mechanically:

"Holy Mary, Mother of Mercies, pray for us poor sinners."

But he must rouse himself. Already Blanchette was alarmed at his silence and was crying:

"Father François, Father François, speak to me. For the love of Mary, speak."

Then he spoke with deep hollow chest tones.

"Blanchette Jupont, thou hast sinned mortally in setting thy carnal affections upon a priest of God. Yet repentance is still permitted thee. The saints shall plead for thee. The Crucified is still an atonement for thee. Verily, the sin killeth, but atonement maketh alive."

The sternness with which he begun failed him, and his last words were pleading and tender.

He ceased. The last sound came back to his ears in a hollow, echoing murmur. Then there was silence. Perhaps Blanchette had fled. He pushed open the door. The cathedral was dark, except where two feeble candles burned before the picture of the Virgin. He stood for a moment, reaching out his arms hesitatingly, as a blind man. The other side of the confessional box was open. In his groping he felt the door swung back. He breathed freely once more and took a quick step forward. Then he drew back with a cry of horror. Blanchette lay at his feet. He had almost trodden upon her.

One instant he turned his face upward in the darkness.

"Holy Saint Anthony, pray for me, pray for me," he murmured.

The next he threw himself on the ground, crying, "Blanchette, Blanchette," chafing her hands, one of which he had crushed. There was some holy water in the chancel, and raising her prostrate form in his arms, he staggered to the little circle of light and sprinkled her face with the sacred drops. At last she stirred and opened her eyes on his face, bending close to hers.

"Pierre, my Pierre," she whispered, still but half-conscious.

Pierre drew back into the shadow and watched her slowly returning to life. The dim candle-light fell on her face, pale with grief, her eyes large with weeping, her hands thin and worn with the tale of the beads. And as he watched, he felt a great pity and love surge up in his heart. The years of priestly training were swept away in a moment. Forgotten were the saints and martyrs whom he had reverenced. Forgotten the Virgin before whose shrine he had lain prostrate so many hours. In his soul there was another adoration.

The candles burned low; one of them expired. Then the doors of the cathedral opened wide, and the upper end shone brightly in the light of the torches borne by the priests marching slowly to the music of their processional hymn. At their head the Bishop of Quebec, tall and stately. After him came the Fathers of the Jesuit establishment; curés from the outlying parishes; missionaries from distant stations, bronzed with exposure; perhaps mutilated by the tomahawk or fires of their adversaries.

Pierre turned his head. In that advancing procession of emaciated, black forms, and cold, stern, set faces he saw the symbol of all he had been taught to consider worthy or heroic. Before him, with the feeble gleam of the candle upon her, was lying the embodiment of all that he should think impure and shameful. Was her face really the home of the frail, the false, the vicious? The fathers, even Father François, had said so. Was she a devil to tempt him, or an angel sent to guide and bless him?

"*Audi preces cum fletibus*," sang the fathers.

The words came to Pierre as from a great distance. He did not realise that in a moment the glare of those torches would be upon him. Already half the Cathedral glowed and flickered in their light. Then Blanchette spoke in a low whisper, "Pierre." He was at her side. She was frightened, and had called for help. He lifted her in his arms once more, and fled lightly and swiftly across the chancel and out into the night.

. . . . . .

The winter died at last, even in Canada. The snow mantle grew thin and ragged, letting the earth appear in great brown patches. Then a little verdure showed itself creeping along

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the black branches of the forest. The leaves grew larger and coloured the woods with the vivid green of early summer.

The green turned to crimson and gold. Then the leaves fell and lay in heaps beneath the trees. The breeze came from the north, and it became higher and sharper, one could almost hear the great winter coming down with stealthy footsteps through the forest in the sound of that north wind blowing over the rustling leaves.

On the bank of one of the streams which flow southward into the valley of the great lakes stood a small wigwam, a wretched affair made of a few saplings bent together and covered with bark. It was quite alone; for leagues in every direction there was no human habitation. Near the wigwam was a mound of fresh earth, beside which stood a man in the black cowl of the Jesuit Order, chanting the office of the dead:

"*Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.*"

The voice was hoarse and rough at first; but, as it grew clearer and mellower, it thrilled and vibrated with grief, rising and falling in solemn mournful cadence:

"*Requiem æternam ei dona, Domine.*"

The priest stood still beside the grave. He was bareheaded; his sunken, lack-lustre eyes looked out from under his long, matted hair; his face was gaunt with famine; his cassock was confined about his emaciated body by a girdle of wild vine. At last he started, and with a look backward at the deserted wigwam and unmarked grave, he strode quickly toward the river.

A birch canoe was drawn upon the bank. He pushed it before him into the mid-current of the stream and threw himself prostrate into its bottom.

The canoe floated on, shooting through narrow gorges where the river foamed and boiled, or gliding over wide spaces where the current scarcely made itself felt. The priest remained immovable. The noon sun and the cold dew of evening alike fell on his upturned brow, but he did not raise his head. The river bent itself between two jutting capes and was lost in the larger body of water beyond: the canoe rocked uneasily upon the surface of Lake Ontario.

A wave struck its side. It tipped, and the water ran in over the edge. It partly sank for an instant. Then, turning itself over, it rose again. The black-garbed form had disappeared beneath the water, but the canoe continued to float bottom upward on the surface of the lake.

"I LOVE YOU"

A GOOD many people have heard or read of Beermouth. Not quite so many, seduced by the prospect of "a clear bracing atmosphere, charming surroundings, refined associations, seaside and country combined, etc," have visited the place, and fully ninety-five per cent of the last named have vowed they will never on any consideration set their foot in Beermouth again.

How or why I came to Beermouth, it is needless to explain. But there I was, and there I was likely to remain; for at half-past four, on a dun-coloured autumn afternoon, I learnt to my disgust that I should have to wait something like a couple of hours before I could get a train which would land me anywhere within twenty miles of my destination.

And so there was nothing left for me but to throw myself on the mercies of that fully-licensed house, the Bull and Pup, which stands close to the railway station.

I established myself in solitary dignity in the bar-parlour, and there, while I smoked an excessively rank pipe to the accompaniment of some remarkably bad beer, I did make all manner of blessing upon Beermouth and its inhabitants, and particularly its railway service.

It was a positive relief to see the swing door pushed open. Anybody would have been welcome then. I could have found it in my heart to be hail fellow well met even to the oldest inhabitant.

Three men came into the parlour. The first, a slim, fashionably-dressed man of forty or so, favoured me with a slight bow and a cheerful "Good afternoon," as he advanced to the fire. There was nothing remarkable about the other two, who were squarely-built, middle-aged men, and from their attire might have been anything from commercial travellers downwards. They took their places on a settee near the door, and one of them ordered a couple of pints of ale from the barmaid.

"And a large brandy and soda for me, miss," struck in the slim gentleman, "and you need not trouble to put in all the soda. It is a trifle cold for ærated waters this kind of day. Miserable weather," he went on, addressing me, "When I think of what it is in Nice I positively shudder."

And very realistically he did shudder as he rubbed his hands over the cheerful blaze.

"Ever been to Nice?" he asked, as he seated himself opposite me and took a sip from the glass the barmaid had placed at his side.

I told him I had.

"Then there is no need to tell you of its beauties, its fascinations. No need to discourse to you upon the glory of the vine and olive-clad shores of the Mediterranean, along which the 'player's train' speeds daily on its way to Monte Carlo. A man can never be said to have lived until he has been to Monte Carlo, sir. It is there alone that you can love, that you can hate, that you can rejoice, that you can suffer; aye, until a man with the most powerful of wills, the most cast-iron of determinations, can say, and say truly: 'I have not lived in vain.'"

"It was last year at Monte Carlo that I met my fate," he went on, after a short pause, and a renewed application to his glass. "And, as we are likely to be here for the next twenty minutes or so, I will, if you will permit me, tell you the tale." I bowed assent.

"When a man plays at Monte Carlo," he continued, "he comes away either a winner or a loser, for the simple reason that, whatever his position may be at any period of the game, he must either win more or lose less, and so he goes on until either he has broken the bank or the bank has broken him. So it was with me.

"The first night I sat down and wagered a five franc piece simply for the excitement of the thing. It went, I put down another to get the first back. It went. To cut the matter short, I lost forty five-franc pieces, and then I judged it expedient to retire to my hotel and dream on it. The next night—the next, and the next, I returned to the field of battle with precisely the same result.

"Each evening I took with me to the table forty pieces of five francs, neither more nor less. Each evening I as regularly rose from my seat without a sou. And, mind you, there was not in my case any alternations of hope and despair—not even the faintest gleam of that shallow luck which at rare intervals serves to gild the career of even the most ordinary of gamblers. I lost unvaryingly and unceasingly, until I had compassed the

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(for Monte Carlo) phenomenal record of having backed the wrong colour two hundred times in succession.

"The loss of a thousand francs is nothing to cry about. Moreover, I had plenty more behind it. Still it annoyed me, particularly as on that fifth evening the well-dressed mob fairly crowded one another solely to have a peep at the 'unluckiest man who had ever been seen at Monte Carlo.'

"On the sixth morning I was in a most unenviable frame of mind, and after breakfast I strode up and down the terrace of the hotel trying to soothe my irritation with a pipe; the while I strove in vain to solve the problem offered by my extraordinary ill-luck. All at once she came, passing through one of the doors on to the terrace—my love, my life. My destiny, though little I knew it then.

"She was not a girl, but a woman of thirty, or perhaps a year or two more. She was not what the world at large would call beautiful. But it was the glory of her wondrous Spanish eyes which took my heart captive then and there. In an instant I knew that I loved her better than ever woman was loved in this world. I was not long in finding out who she was—the wife of a wealthy English manufacturer—a man much older than herself. She and her husband had arrived at the hotel the night before, and were likely, so the manager said, to remain there for some time.

"The same night I again went to the tables, this time with a single note for a thousand francs in my pocket. I found a seat, and after watching the course of the game for a few minutes, I ventured my stake on the red. Red it was, I left the money down—stake and winnings—and again red came up. As I drew my four thousand francs I glanced over my shoulder, and there was the lady just behind me.

"I rose and offered her my seat. She took it and began to play. Less than ten minutes settled her. By the distressed look she cast around the table I could see that she had lost all her money. For me to pass her one of my notes was the work of an instant. She took it with a smile and a bow, and put it on the black. Up popped zero. In quick succession I handed her the remaining three notes. They all went in on the black, just as they had come to me on the red.

"As the croupier was raking in the last of my crisp pieces of paper, the lady's husband stepped behind her, and laid his hand heavily on her shoulder. She rose and faced him. What he said to her, I know not, for he spoke in Spanish—a language I do not understand. But her face grew deathly pale, and her blue-black eyes blazed with anger. Then he turned to me.

"'Sir,' he said, 'you have lent my wife money. It was a chivalrous action, but from my point of view, considering the purpose for which the money has been applied, your generosity has been misplaced. However, I have only to beg you to tell me the amount in which my wife is indebted to you so that I may reimburse you.'

"'*Vingt mille francs*,' came the answer, sharp and clear, in the purest Parisian from the lady.

"I opened my mouth to protest, but the lady laid her finger on her lip and, like a fool, I was silent.

"'A cheque shall be sent you this evening,' he replied, with which he took his wife's arm and led her from the hall. When I reached the hotel that night a letter was handed me by the clerk. I opened the cover. It contained an open cheque for eight hundred pounds, signed by the manufacturer.

"Next morning I was once more on the terrace. I felt like a knave, and, no doubt, I looked like one; for was not that accursed cheque burning its way from my waistcoat pocket literally to my heart-strings? Again the lady appeared. This time she came straight to me.

"'Sir,' she said, speaking rapidly in French, 'last night you did me a great favour; to-day you can do me an even greater one. I told my husband I owed you twenty thousand francs, because I had urgent need of sixteen thousand, and it was the only means by which I could get the money. Here are your four thousand francs, and now please give me my husband's cheque.'

"I hesitated.

"'I know you will,' she pleaded.

"'Why?' I stammered, as I handed her the slip of pink paper.

"'Because—I love you!' and turning swiftly on her heel she sped into the hotel.

"That afternoon she and her husband took their departure from the hotel—whither, I knew not—nor did I take any particular trouble to find out. I am a fatalist, sir, and I believe that everything comes to the man who waits. I waited patiently weeks and months, till last June. One night I was in the stalls at the Queen's Theatre. *She* was in a private box. She beckoned me up with her fan, and I sat by her during the whole of the performance. Can you doubt that I ventured to tell her of the deep love that was in my heart for her? She listened, and when I had finished, she said:

"'My friend, what I told you at Monte Carlo is true. I love you. But one obstacle bars our path to happiness. My husband. You must kill him!'

"'In a duel?' I asked.

"'Duel! No!' and she laughed merrily. 'He is one of your solid, respectable Englishmen, and if you spoke to him of a duel he would hand you over to the care of the police in less than no time. You must murder him!'

"'Never,' I gasped.

"'Why not?' she asked. 'You have robbed for me. Why should you not murder? Is it not written somewhere or other that the man who will steal needs but little to induce him to murder? Listen, my husband has gone to-night to one of those solemn commercial dinners which I abhor and detest. He will return on foot, and will reach home at a little before one. Here is the address,' and she thrust an envelope into my hand. 'Choose your time—kill him!'

"That night I killed him; placed a stiletto in so neat and workmanlike a manner between his shoulders that he fell without a groan. There is the making of a fine art in murder," and my companion chuckled merrily.

"You killed him!" I gasped, as I moved my chair back a few feet.

"Certainly," was the matter-of-fact reply; "what is a husband more or less when he is in the way? But, listen, that is not the worst; the murder remained a nine days' wonder—one of those hidden mysteries which go towards making up London's sum of happiness. After a reasonable delay, I called upon the widow—*my* widow. She was not alone. Another man was seated in the drawing-room. Do you know what she told me before him? That the love which had been mine was his, that she was to marry him the next day, and that I was to be left."

Then, bending forward, my companion whispered hoarsely:

"I killed them both with the poker. I will show you how!" And, springing to his feet, he grasped the poker from the fender and swung it above his head; but only for a second, for the two men were on him, and in a trice he was handcuffed, and a broad strap bound around his legs. Oh, how he howled and shrieked, and blasphemed and prayed by turns!

"Stark that, will yer?" growled one of the men. "Oh, yer won't! Then we'll try how this suits yer," and a hastily-improvised gag was thrust into his mouth. "Sorry to disturb you, sir," the man added, addressing me; "but he'd have brained yer with that poker in a couple of shakes if we hadn't stepped in. His friends kep' him at home till to-day; but now he's turned dangerous, and we're taking him to the asylum. There's the trap, Bill. Come along," and, one taking the head and the other the feet, the men carried their writhing burden out of the room.

Calmly and methodically the barman came in to remove the glasses, and then informed me, in the most matter-of-fact fashion, that such scenes were of frequent occurrence in the bar parlour of the Bull and Pup, while keepers and patients, who had arrived by train, were waiting for a conveyance to take them to the asylum, some eight miles distant.

"But," I asked, "do you think it wise to serve a raging lunatic with a large brandy and soda?"

"Brandy and soda, indeed!" and he sniffed contemptuously. "Not much! That was toast and water. We knows them 'ere loonatics, we does."

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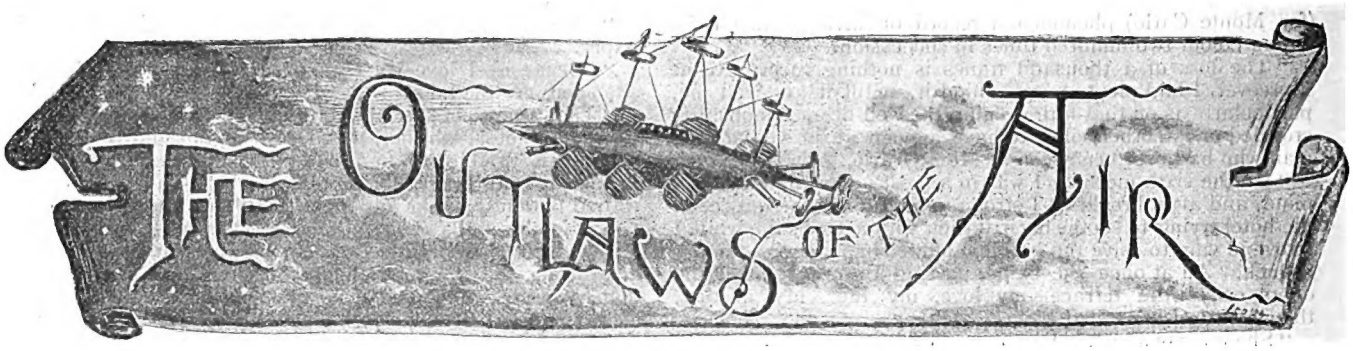

By George Griffith,

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "The Syren of the Skies," &c.

SUMMARY.

Max Renault—leading spirit of Anarchist Autonomie Group No. 7, who has joined the Utopians (a Socialistic colony on an island in the South Pacific) in order to steal the air-ship they are building, which he succeeds in doing.

Franz Hartog—a German engineer, in league with Renault, who steals a very fast torpedo-boat destroyer from the Russian Government to levy blackmail on the Atlantic.

Sir Harry Milton—a wealthy young English nobleman, who by chance comes across the island of Utopia in his yacht, the *Calypso*, and subsequently devotes the whole of his fortune to hunting down Renault and Hartog.

Herbert Wyndham—a lieutenant in the British Navy who is travelling with Sir Harry for the benefit of his health, and who determines to resign his commission and couple his energies with those of Sir Harry in destroying the Anarchists, on account of the fact that he has been stabbed by Renault when the latter attempts to carry off Violet in the air-ship.

Frederick Austen—the inventor of the air-ship, who shares its secret with Edward Adams, Dr. Edwards, and Ambrose Millar, three other Utopians.

Frank Markham—the young captain of the Utopian yacht, *Mermaid*.

Violet Milton—Sir Harry's sister, and Lieutenant Wyndham's sweetheart, is fearfully injured by throwing herself out of the air-ship on which Renault has tried to carry her off.

Dora Merton—a fair Utopian, who has made an impression on Sir Harry.

Lucy Summers—another fair Utopian.

Renault in the air-ship *Vengeur*, and Hartog in the torpedo-boat *Destroyer*, levy blackmail on the high seas. Just as they have annihilated a combined British, French, and Portuguese fleet sent to discover them, a Maxim aeroplane, the *Britannia*, comes on the scene, and is captured by the *Vengeur*. Those on it are put ashore, and one of the crew shoots at Renault and wounds him. A few weeks later Renault and Hartog set out for the Island of Utopia for the purpose of destroying its inhabitants, but find it deserted. On the discovery of Renault's treachery, the whole colony had gone back to England, Wyndham, together with Adams, Austen, Sir Harry, and his sister Violet, travelling in the *Nautilus*, a newly-built torpedo-boat, which, while coming up the English Channel, is challenged by a British cruiser. It appears that England is at war with Russia, and war with France is imminent. The *Nautilus* is sent in pursuit of two French torpedo-boats, and destroys them both.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A Visit to Paris.

While these events were taking place in England, the crews of the *Destroyer* and the *Bremen* were enjoying what they no doubt considered a well-earned holiday amidst the tropical beauties of Utopia. Renault and Hartog had decided for the present at any rate to take possession of the island and the dock-yard, keeping a sharp look out for unwelcome visitors, and to take advantage of their leisure to fit out the *Bremen* as a floating workshop for the construction of the air ships, as soon as the necessary materials could be obtained from their agents in America, England, and Europe.

They knew that they would be free from interruption at any rate for a period of some weeks, it might even be months, since it would be absurd for an expedition to be sent out to attack them in the island, unless it could be supported by at least two or three air-ships, and these Max knew from experience could not possibly be built and made ready for flight in less than four months from the time that work was commenced on them. He knew that Sir Harry and his friends would push on the construction of their vessels with the utmost possible speed; and he also saw clearly that, if there was going to be a fight for the empire of the air, the side that got its fleet on the wing first would have an immense advantage over the other.

So convinced was he of the paramount necessity of expedition that, after he had been a fortnight in Utopia, and had seen Hartog get everything into working order, he determined to run the risk of a journey to America and Europe, in order to personally visit his agents and push on the construction of the various parts of the air-ships to the utmost possible speed.

It was not, however, only reasons of policy which impelled him to this decision, for Max Renault was a man who possessed all the strong passions usually associated with his masterful type of character, and of these, next to the ruling passion which had made him the implacable enemy of all organised society, the strongest was his love for the beautiful girl in whom he had recognised a soul kindred to his own, which, while admitting his superior strength as a leader and an organiser of the forces of Anarchy, had tacitly asserted an authority of its own over him, an authority which she knew he was willing to bow to the moment that she gave him the permission she had hitherto coldly and consistently withheld, because in the nature of the case it must involve the surrender of herself to him.

His attempt to carry off Violet in the air-ship from Utopia had really only been the result of a passing fancy, strengthened by a savage desire to inflict an irreparable injury upon her and her brother, and the friend who was perhaps her lover, simply because they were members of the class that he hated with the whole strength and bitterness of his perverted nature. Had the attempt been successful—if Violet had been cast in a less heroic mould, and had not chosen the peril of almost certain death to the slavery which he would have imposed upon her—he would, probably, have amused himself with her as long as the fancy lasted and then killed her in cold blood to remove an obstacle to the execution of his plans.

But with regard to Lea Cassilis, his feelings were very different. He really loved her with the love that such a man as he only gives once and to one woman, no matter how many others might claim or win the admiration of the passing moment. And now his thoughts had gone back to the challenge that she had given and he had accepted in the little upstairs room in the back street off the Caledonian Road more than four years before.

She had tacitly admitted that if the projects of that memorable night were realised it would be for him to take and keep that which he chose should be his—and did she not well know what that would be? Now the power to carry out those projects was finally his. He was no longer the nameless Anarchist lurking in the obscurity of city slums and planning murders and outrages in the dark. He was the acknowledged and unquestioned leader of a band of desperate men who had declared open war upon the world and had so far proved themselves invincible.

Then they were poor; now they were wealthy, and their wealth skilfully used would enable them to turn the resources of civilisation against itself. They could spend money like water, and every pound would buy as much for them as it would for everyone else. There was no fear of their spending too much. The wealth of the world's commerce was theirs to

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draw upon as they needed. There was no answer but submission to the demands which came from the unassailable vantage ground of the air.

Would Lea still hold to her part of the implied bargain between them? Would she think that he had accomplished enough of his part to claim the performance of hers, or would she tell him to wait until the now inevitable struggle for the empire of the air had been fought and won, and society lay helpless before the most formidable and implacable enemies that it had ever had?

It was to receive an answer to these questions and others that were shaping themselves in his heart and setting his cool, evenly-flowing blood aflame that, after a two months' voyage, during which he had visited every agent in America and England, and with his own eyes seen and inspected the progress of the work on the materials of the air-ships, that he set the *Vengeur's* head towards Paris and dropped her to the earth one dark night in the forest of Fontainebleau.

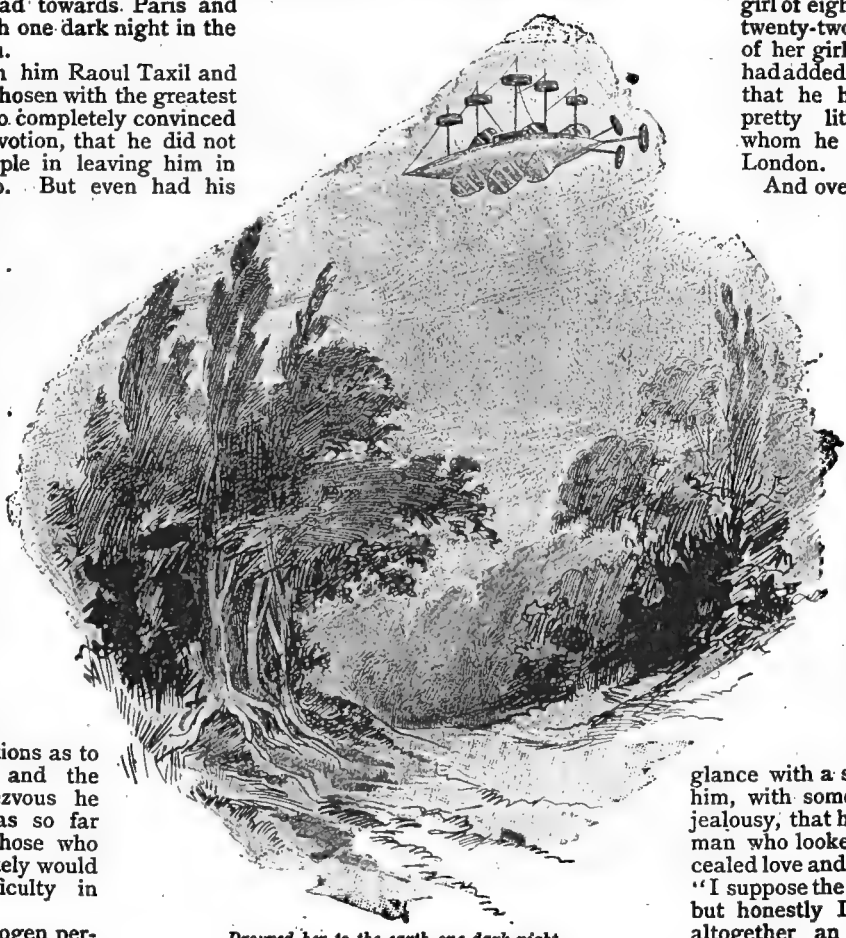
He had brought with him Raoul Taxil and six men whom he had chosen with the greatest care. Taxil had now so completely convinced him of his personal devotion, that he did not feel the slightest scruple in leaving him in charge of the air-ship. But even had his estimate been wrong he knew that treachery was impossible, if only because everyone on board the *Vengeur* was convinced it would not pay. He was the only one who was able to prepare the motor fuel which worked the *Vengeur's* engines. Not even Franz had been admitted to the secret. It fact Max had told him point blank that he would put a bullet through the head of him or any one else that he even suspected of trying to share the secret with him.

When he left the air-ship, after having given Taxil full instructions as to evading observation, and the keeping of the rendezvous he had appointed, he was so far disguised that even those who knew him most intimately would have had some difficulty in recognising him.

A liberal use of hydrogen peroxide had bleached his hair from glossy black to the bright bronze tint which had been so popular among beauties, professional and otherwise, a few years before. His dark eyebrows had been lightened by the same means, and a neatly trimmed moustache and imperial to match had been skilfully affixed to his clean-shaven lip and chin.

With a light valise in his hand he made his way into the town of Fontainebleau, and caught a train there which landed him in Paris shortly before midnight. He slept in a small hotel near the Lyons station, and occupied the following forenoon in fitting himself out with clothes which would be less conspicuous in Paris than the quaint ill-fitting odds and ends that he had been obliged to borrow from his men.

Before doing this, however, he had despatched a telegram addressed to Madame Cora Dail, 5, Rue Vernet, Champs Elysées, and the consequence of this was that when at four o'clock that afternoon he sent up a card inscribed; "François Laroche," and having an almost imperceptible pencil-mark in the top left-hand corner, to the first floor, the concierge informed him that he was expected, and touched a bell which brought a smart English footman to conduct him to Madame's presence.



Dropped her to the earth one dark night.

As the portière of the luxuriously-furnished boudoir fell behind him, a slight and still almost girlish figure rose with a nearly inaudible rustle of soft draperies from a low couch in a delightful little curtained alcove formed by a deep window looking out on to the broad tree-lined avenue.

"Welcome, Monsieur Max," said a well-remembered voice, and as he took the little, cool, soft hand that was placed in his, he looked up and their eyes met. It was Lea, but Lea glorified; and the sight of her beauty dazzled him for the moment and seemed to deprive his usually ready and deliberate tongue. The four years which had transformed the girl of eighteen into the woman of twenty-two had touched nothing of her girlish freshness, but they had added to it a reposeful dignity that he had never seen in the pretty little dressmaker, with whom he had fallen in love in London.

And over and above this there was the glamour that wealth, which only emphasises the coarseness of the common human material, enables innate refinement to glorify itself with. Madame Cora Dail, the alleged widow of the millionaire slayer of hogs in Chicago, was a very different person from Lea Cassilis, the clever and precocious girl-member of the Autonomie Group No. 7, and this Renault saw at a glance before she had uttered her second sentence in greeting to him.

"You are somewhat changed I see," she went on, meeting his glance with a steadiness that warned him, with something like a pang of jealousy, that he was not now the only man who looked at her with unconcealed love and admiration in his eyes. "I suppose the change was necessary, but honestly I can't say that it is altogether an improvement. That moustache and imperial—may I ask whether they are a natural growth or only assumed for the occasion?"

There was a slight suspicion of mockery both in her tone and her words that irritated him not a little, and seemed to tell him that he was likely to find the distance between them as great as ever, but he kept himself well in hand and replied in similar tones.

"Unfortunately, the change which has the misfortune to fail to please your ladyship was necessary, but, happily for me, it is not permanent. The moustache and imperial were purchased with the hair-dye, and have only been in position since last night. A pretty fair growth for the time, aren't they? But, to turn to a more interesting subject, permit me to offer my compliments in exchange for your welcome. To use the old simile of the butterfly and the chrysalis ——"

"Thanks, Monsieur Max, we will take it as spoken," she interrupted with a half curtsey and a smile that dazzled him

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A slight and almost girlish figure rose.

afresh. "I was in hopes that you had brought some more interesting conversation with you than that. Let me assure you that since I have been the widow of an American millionaire, with half Paris at my feet, my ears have been so sated with pretty sayings that I could almost thank anyone who would be absolutely rude to me.

"But come," she went on, with a sudden and, to Max, very pleasant change in her manner. "I suppose we have something better to talk about than this. Ah, there is the coffee. I have given instructions that I am not at home to the President himself, if he should do me the honour to make an afternoon call, and so for the next two hours at least we can entertain each other with all the news that we have to exchange. For instance, I am literally dying to hear all about your life on that wonderful island of Utopia where ——"

"Utopia!" he interrupted. "How did you know that was its name?"

"Why from Leo Marcel, of course. When I heard that he had got back from Africa, as he did just when all Europe was ringing with your aerial exploits over the Atlantic, I sent him a telegram asking him to come over to Paris and tell me all he could about you—I mean about your adventures and the air-ship. Ah, that reminds me, tell me first, have you brought her with you to France?"

"I am more than delighted by the knowledge that you thought me worthy of so much interest," replied Max, obeying the gesture which invited him to seat himself on the dainty silk-covered sociable on which she was reclining. "Yes, I have brought her. Last night she landed me in the forest of Fontainebleau, and by this time she should be safely hidden in some snug little ravine in the Pyrenees."

"In the Pyrenees!" exclaimed Lea; "that is a very long way off, isn't it? Are you not afraid of your lieutenant or your crew running off with your priceless craft, and going into the general destruction business on their own account?"

"Not in the slightest," laughed Max, with a shake of his head. "I can trust them because they know that they can do nothing without me. I am the only one who knows how the *Vengeur* is driven, and, when they had used up the motive power that there is on board, they would have to get out and walk, for they couldn't make her fly another yard to save them from the guillotine. As for the distance, you forget that aerial travelling is not exactly like going by train or steamboat. The Pyrenees are only a three hours' flight from Paris, and if I had her here now you should dine in London this evening if you wished to do so."

"Marvellous!" she replied, looking at him this time with a real interest in her eyes. "But, of course, I had forgotten for the moment what Marcel told me about your speed. And now tell me, when may I expect a trip to the clouds in this wonderful cruiser that owns you as her master?"

"She will be back in the same spot at Fontainebleau at ten o'clock to-morrow night," said Max; "and then, if you think you can safely trust yourself with me, she shall take you, not only to the clouds, but beyond them, to the heights where the sun shines all day and the stars all night, and then she shall carry you to any spot of the world you may choose to see. If you would like to be the first woman who has ever set eyes upon the North Pole or the South, you shall see it, for the earth has no obstacles that the *Vengeur* cannot laugh at.

"I tell you, Lea, that the conquest of the air means more than you have ever dreamed of; and if you will come with me to-morrow night, I will show you the wonders and glories of a kingdom such as no man ever ruled over before, and which is only waiting for the fairest woman on earth to come and be its queen."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TRAPPED.

No woman, and least of all women, Lea Cassilis, could have mistaken the meaning either of the words or of the low, passion-thrilled tone in which they were spoken. She looked at him as he sat there, leaning slightly towards her and possessing an unlikeness to himself that was almost grotesque. And as she looked she thought of the scene in the little clubroom, when she had snatched her hand away from under his and told him that it would be time enough to ask when he had the power to take.

Since then many things had happened. She had reigned for a season as the belle of Paris, spending money as she

A snug little ravine in the Pyrenees.

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pleased with both hands, worming her way into intrigues which laid bare before her eyes the inner workings of the vast machine that is called Society. Before her radiant beauty and lavishly-spent wealth, all doors had flown open. She had mingled with the great ones of the earth; she had learned their secrets and won their homage; and she had seen that the management of nations was carried on by means of just the same petty trickery and sordid selfishness as she had witnessed in the conduct of the business of the fashionable dressmaker who had once been her mistress.

The further she had seen into Society, the less she liked anything save that gay, brilliant, idle aspect of it which was already beginning to bore her. Since she had come to Paris, fortunes, titles, and vast estates had been laid one after another at her feet, only to be rejected with a smiling tolerant disdain that had made some of the wits of Paris remark that "*la belle Americaine*" would be contented with nothing less than a crown.

Perhaps, after all, it was a crown that she was waiting for; and, if so, the hour and the man had come, and the crown would be hers for the taking, if she would but put out her hand for it. True it would be no tiara of gold and jewels, such as the queens of the earth wore, yet it would be such that the proudest of them might well envy her its possession. It would be the diadem of an empire without frontiers, of a realm that included the whole earth, and from whose throne she could hurl her lightnings alike upon palace and prison, striking down the mightiest and the meanest with a more than royal impartiality, and all this would be hers if only——

He picked Lea up in his arms.

"Monsieur Max," she said, with a new light in her eyes, and a brighter flush on her cheeks, when her thoughts had run thus far, "I know what you mean. You are thinking of what we said at the club that night. Well, I have been thinking of it too. I remember what I said and what you said, as distinctly, perhaps, as you do. Tell me now truly, for the sake of our common hatred of society, have you literally and actually the power to do what you said you would do then, and, therefore, to take what you—well, what you led me then to believe that you wanted?"

"I have," said Max, laying his hand on hers just as he had done that night: "I have the power and I have the will, and yet——"

"And yet what?" she asked, dropping her eyes for a moment before the steady gaze of his passion-lit eyes.

"Yet, though I have the will, there is something else that prevents me permitting it to put the power into action—something that makes me, virtual master of the world though I shall be in a few weeks from now, yet not master of myself."

"And that is?"

His grip tightened upon her hand as he answered:

"There is no need for me to tell you what you know already, Lea. A man does not love a woman like you and remain his own master long, and it is just because I love you that I cannot use the power which would force you to choose between surrender and destruction. If I loved you less than I do, it would be easy for me to wait my opportunity and carry you off in the *Vengeur*——"

"As you tried to carry off Violet Milton, eh?" interrupted Lea, looking into his eyes with a cold, searching glance, and speaking in the even tones of the merest common-place.

Such an unexpected facer would have disconcerted ninety-nine men out of a hundred, but Max Renault was the hundredth.

Inwardly, the shock of Lea's words seemed to him to drive every drop of blood out of his heart; but, outwardly, his iron nerves gave no sign of discomfiture. Like a flash, he saw that Lea's keen subtle wit had, with the single question, purposely created what might be the crisis of his life.

On his answer to it would depend her answer to the supreme question that he had put to her by implication in his last speech. His splendid nerves responded instantly to the call. Without the quiver of an eyelid, or a quaver in his voice, he replied:

"Ah; so you have heard of that little romance, have you? and that means that you have made the acquaintance of some of the Utopians or their visitors. May I ask who?"

If she had obeyed her first impulse, she would have struck him across the face, and ordered him out of the room, at whatever risk to herself. But the mood passed as quickly as it came. A glance at the strong, stern face and the steady eyes before her told her that in this stronger nature than her own she had met her master, and, as she was a woman, she liked him none the less for it.

As the sudden anger passed out of her heart, it was replaced by something that had never been there before, and her voice had just the least perceptible tremor in it as she answered his question.

"Sir Harry Milton brought his sister over to Paris nearly two months ago to put her under the care of Roulier, the great nerve specialist, and I met him while he was here. You didn't kill her, you know, when you threw her out of the air-ship—or, I forget, did she throw herself out?"

"Oh, she threw herself out," replied Max, with a note of astonishment in his voice. "But you amaze me by telling me she didn't die. Why she pitched herself out headlong when the air-ship was over a hundred feet from the ground—nearly two hundred, in fact. The girl must have as many lives as a cat."

"And suppose she hadn't thrown herself out, what then?" asked Lea, with a quite indescribable inflection of her voice.

"What then? May I smoke?" said Max, taking out his cigarette case.

Lea nodded, not having a word ready to reply with. He struck a match, lit his cigarette, and went on, in a voice that could not have been more imperturbable if he had been discussing the day's prices on the Bourse:

"Well, then I suppose I should have acted as any other man who was also a good Anarchist would have done under the circumstances. You see, under those same circumstances Miss Milton would have had the disadvantage of being at the same time a really decent-looking girl and the daughter of a race which every good Anarchist is, by the very principles of his being, impelled to reduce to the last extremity of degradation, and so——"

"And so," said Lea, leaning forward, her lovely face all aglow with what was now genuine, uncontrollable admiration for the masterful spirit of the man who, without a perceptible effort, had thus put her desperately meant home-thrust aside—"and so there isn't the slightest need for you to say any more about it.

"Max, I've met my master, and, like any other woman who is a woman, I'm glad of it. There's my hand. Take it or leave it, as seems good to you. When the *Vengeur* comes back to Fontainebleau, you will only have to renew your invitation, and I will take that trip to the clouds and beyond them—as your guest, remember—and you shall show me all these kingdoms of the air and the world and the glories thereof, and after that—well, we shall see. Now, does that content you?"

Max made no reply in words, simply because no words occurred to him which to his mind were capable of doing justice to the situation. He rose to his feet, picked Lea up

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bodily in his arms, pressed one long lingering kiss on her willingly surrendered lips, and then put her down again. Then seating himself beside her, he put his arm round her waist, drew her head down on to his breast, and said quietly:

"It is so! If ever mortal man had reason to be content, then I am content. I have offered you what no man was ever yet able to offer to woman, and you have accepted it. May the Fates cover all my plans with confusion if ever, for a moment even, you have reason to regret the choice that you have taken!"

And then he bent his head down and kissed her again, and after that she raised her head and looked him in the eyes, and said in a low, steady tone:

"Even so. You have given to me what never was given to woman before, and I have given you in return all that a woman can give, and if either of us fails in justice to the other, may that other be able and willing to exact the last penalty of vengeance that human hate could wish for! And now let us talk."

The hint was obvious, and Renault took it, and so for nearly an hour this strangely-betrothed man and woman sat and talked just as any other man and woman in all Paris might have talked, saving only for the subject of their conversation. Each told the other in quiet, matter-of-fact narrative what his or her experiences had been since the last time they had met, and then they went on to discuss the prospect that now lay before the ruthless apostles of the propaganda by force.

They discussed the fate of nations as though they had been the joint arbiters of Destiny, and they decided whether monarchs and statesmen should live or die as best suited their purposes; whether the war that had been declared between Britain and Russia should be allowed to go on, or whether either State should be paralysed by blows which they alone could strike at its head; and whether those who now held the guiding reins of the world should be allowed to hold them a little longer, or whether, by striking them down, one after the other, in swift succession, the States of Europe should be thrown headlong into the demoralisation of leaderless anarchy. As the little clock in the boudoir chimed six, Lea rose and said:

"Now, for the present, or till to-morrow morning, *au revoir*. As I told you I have a card for the President's reception to-night at eight, and you may be sure that I shall not fail to do what is necessary. By to-morrow I shall have made the necessary arrangements for our journey, and you will find me at the Lyons station at eight o'clock, by which time those whom it may concern will understand that I am somewhere else. Happily rich American widows in Paris are expected now and then to be guilty of some eccentricity and this will do for one of them. And so, *mon maitre bien aimé, à demain, au revoir!*"

When the train left Paris for the south at a quarter past eight the following evening, Max and Lea were seated in a first class *coupé*, and by ten o'clock they had reached the little open space in the forest in which Lea for the first time saw the, to her, strange shape of the *Vengeur*, as the air-ship, prompt to the minute of the rendezvous, dropped slowly through the darkness on to the soft brown turf.

Five minutes later they were on board, and Lea saw the tree-tops swiftly sinking down beneath her as the *Vengeur* soared up again into her element. The night was dark and cloudy, but through the clouds the pale glimmer of half a moon could every now and then be seen. As soon as the *Vengeur* was well clear of the trees, Max took Lea with him into the conning-tower and, inclining the slats of the air-planes, he sent a signal for full speed to the engine room. Then slipping his arm round Lea's waist, partly perhaps with the object of keeping her steady during the air-ship's upward flight, he said:

A huge shadow of the "Vengeur."

"Now watch with all your eyes!"

The next moment the *Vengeur* leapt forward and upward; the cloven air sang and whistled past her, and the black curtain of cloud seemed to fall bodily towards the earth. For a moment the grey billows rolled noiselessly about them, and then, in wondering admiration too intense for words, Lea saw a vast, limitless sea of snowy cloud-fleeces spread out beneath her, and above she saw the unclouded vault of heaven gemmed by myriads of stars, amidst which the golden crescent of the moon floated stainless and serene, her white light casting a huge shadow of the swiftly flying *Vengeur* on the snowy cloud-sea beneath them.

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There was no sleep for Lea that night. In vain Max tried to persuade her to go to her cabin as the larger hours of the morning approached. Intoxicated with the strange beauties of the scene and the bewildering novelty of her first aerial voyage, she insisted on remaining with him in the conning-tower until the beauties of the moon-lit night were eclipsed by the glories of the sun-rise over the sea of clouds, which still lay outspread beneath them as far as their eyes could reach.

Then, when weariness at last overcame her, she went to her cabin to sleep and dream of all the marvels she had seen, and Max, after sending for Taxil to take command, went to his to dream other dreams no less entrancing. About two o'clock in the afternoon, Lea met Max again in the saloon, and after their greeting, said:

"Well, where has this wonderful voyage brought us to by this time?"

He pulled back the slide from one of the side windows and pointed through a great rift in the clouds that lay a thousand feet below them. Her eyes followed the direction of his finger as he pointed downwards, and she saw beneath the clouds another cloud of grey blue smoke, through which a thousand roofs and spires were dimly showing.

"There's London," he said. "To-night we will dine at the Métropole and then run up to the Criterion and see a comedy, of course adapted from the French, which I think will amuse you. There's a burlesque Anarchist in it, not at all a bad character from the capitalist point of view. The interesting part about it is that in the last act it almost becomes a tragedy."

Not many hours later Lea remembered these lightly-spoken words, in the midst of the first real agony of terror which she had ever passed through. The *Vengeur* was brought to ground in the midst of a dense bank of fog which lay along the Essex shore of the estuary of the Thames, a little to the north of Southend-on-Sea, and Max and Lea landed with one of the crew to carry their two valises and to act as messenger between them and the air-ship if necessary.

Taxil had, of course, received minute instructions as to keeping in touch with them; and, as they took their way towards the station, the *Vengeur* rose in the air again and vanished in the fog.

He was completely trapped.

That evening, as Max had promised, they dined at the Métropole, and afterwards went to the Criterion Theatre to see the comedy and the burlesque Anarchist.

Of all the theatres in London, that was the worst one they could have chosen to visit on that particular night, for, as the fates would have it, while they sat in their stalls, one of the side boxes in the second tier was taken possession of by four gentlemen, who were no others than Sir Harry Milton, Lieutenant Wyndham, Captain Maxwell (late of Her Majesty's ship *Devon*), and Lieutenant Pelham (late of the æroplane *Britannia*), both of whom had been cashiered, one by a court-martial and the other by the syndicate which had sent the *Britannia* to do battle with the *Vengeur*.

In such a place it was impossible that Lea's brilliant and uncommon beauty should not attract almost universal attention. Sir Harry recognised her at once, and then began to look curiously at her companion. Of course, he pointed him out to Wyndham, and then the two opera glasses came earnestly into play. Max's disguise was quite good enough to deceive even an intimate acquaintance passing him casually in the street, but it could not stand the searching examination that he was subjected to for the next two hours.

Feature by feature, gesture by gesture, he was identified without having an idea of what was going on. For, the moment their suspicions were aroused, Sir Harry and Wyndham kept themselves and their friends well in the background of the box. At length when the performance was over conjecture had so far become certainty that all four had determined to take the risks and act.

Just before the curtain came down they left their box and stationed themselves among the well-dressed idlers who were already lounging about the entrance to the theatre. As the occupants of the stalls and dress circle and boxes came slowly up the steps which led from the theatre, they watched each rank narrowly until Lea at last appeared leaning on Max's arm. This was Sir Harry's cue. He walked forward and raising his hat to Lea, said:

"Good evening, Mrs. Dail. Who would have dreamt of seeing you in London! What has London to offer so superior to the delights of Paris?"

Before she could reply, Wyndham stepped quickly up from the other side, with one swift movement of his left hand he snatched the moustache and beard from Max's face, and, taking him by the collar with his right, said in a loud clear voice:

"Good evening, Mr. Max Renault, Anarchist and murderer. Who would have thought of seeing *you* here to-night!"

Max, taken utterly off his guard, tried to wrench himself free and force his way through the excited crowd, which Wyndham's startling words had instantly brought about them, but it was no good, the surprise had been too carefully planned, and he was completely trapped. Captain Maxwell and Lieutenant Pelham elbowed their way through the crowd, each with a policeman at his heels, and when the crowd divided again, it was to allow the officers of the law to go out holding the famous Anarchist securely handcuffed between them.

(*To be continued next week.*)

HOME NOTES! HOME NOTES!! HOME NOTES!!!

The Special Double Winter Number on sale THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13th.

A New Story by Mrs. HUNGERFORD commences in this issue.

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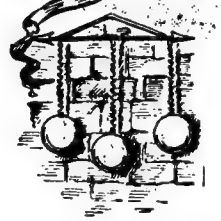
THE LAY BROTHER'S RING.



MONSIEUR LAGRANGE sat behind his window at No. 28, Seymour Street, Pall Mall, looking over his accounts. The window was draped after a fashion that displayed both art and science. A few pieces of old lace and antique jewellery were exhibited in such a way as to inform the initiated passers-by that such articles were bought, sold, and taken in pledge on the premises; while true science was shown in the arrangement by which the master of the establishment could see into the street without himself being observed.

It was a convenient plan; and it enabled M. Lagrange to notice that a tall, pale, clean-shaven young man was peering in at the window in an inquisitive way. He had a semi-clerical aspect, wearing a low-crowned, black, soft felt hat, and that voluminous garment known as an "Inverness cape." His manner was nervous and hesitating, as of a man who found himself in an unwonted or embarrassing situation. He made as though he would pass on, stopped, looked at the name on the brass plate a second time, glanced up and down the street, and then, with an air of affected unconcern, walked into the establishment.

M. Lagrange's street door opened noiselessly, and admitted the visitor to a small, carpeted hall, in which the only apparent aperture was a window like that of the booking office at a railway station, formed chiefly of ground glass. The open part was close to the seat occupied by M. Lagrange, who had, of course, observed all the movements of his visitor.

After standing opposite the aperture for a minute or two without seeing anybody, the stranger rapped gently with his knuckles on the window sill, and shortly afterwards M. Lagrange, with the air of a man who was taking a gentle constitutional, sauntered past the spot.

"I have got a ring," began the stranger, speaking with a marked French accent.

Lagrange gave his visitor a bold look, before which the young man's eyes dropped, and held out his hand for the trinket.

With some hesitation the stranger produced a plain gold ring of a peculiar pattern, and laid it on the desk before him. It was very much like one of those old-fashioned rings which were made with a hollow space for a morsel of the hair of a deceased friend; only, in this case, a scroll-work took the place of glass; and this scroll-work was of a very delicate pattern, here and there pierced with minute holes. Lagrange had seen such rings before, and knew that in former days they had often been used as the repository of some small articles of value, such as a gem or a precious medicine.

Taking it up in his fat, shiny fingers, Lagrange (without a word of apology to the owner) carried the ring to a large plate-glass window under pretence of examining it under a better light. The pawnbroker then weighed the trinket in his hand, peered at it curiously through a magnifying glass, shook it a second, a third, a fourth time with increased interest, for he was certain that he heard something rattle inside.

Bending a little backwards, M. Lagrange took an observation of his visitor through a convenient hole in the ground glass, and then, moved by a feeling that the stranger's face was not unfamiliar to him, he wrote a few words on a scrap of paper, which he despatched through a tube.

"This is a quaint little thing," observed the pawnbroker, returning to his customer.

"A—yes."

"Have you any objection to give a reference? It is usual."

"Well—a—I'm not sure that the Father-Superior would like it. The ring belongs to our Order—the Order of St. Simeon. We lost all our property during the reign of the Commune in Paris, and then the French Government banished us with the other monks."

"What is all that to me?" asked the pawnbroker impatiently.

"One of the Fathers," said the stranger, in a humble tone, "told me to try and borrow a little money on the security of this ring. But, you understand, I must not sell it. It is a kind of relic, for it belonged to Father Clerc, the Superior of our Order, who was shot by the Communists in 1871. He got it conveyed out of prison to one of our friends."

"How?" asked Lagrange, who was beginning to feel interested.

"I cannot tell, I did not belong to the Order then."

"But you do now?"

"Yes, I am a lay-brother."

"Well, I don't mind lending you a sovereign. It's only worth the weight of the gold."

"But we *must* have more than that, Monsieur," and the lay-brother leant forward through the window and spoke in a low, eager tone: "We are all convinced that there is something remarkable about the ring. I have heard that Father Clerc always wore it, and warned us not to part with it, because it would one day bring back prosperity to our community."

"He sent that message out of prison along with the ring?" asked the pawnbroker, in a careless tone.

"So I have heard," responded the lay-brother

Could it be, Lagrange asked himself, that the imprisoned priest had used this ring as a means of conveying a secret message to the rest of the community? He felt interested and curious. Eventually he agreed to lend Brother Antoine three pounds on a special contract, which provided that if the ring was not redeemed within a month it should become the absolute property of Lagrange.

The young lay-brother cast a regretful glance at the ring, signed the agreement, slipped the sovereigns into his pouch, and left the establishment.

No sooner had the door closed behind his customer than Lagrange touched a bell which summoned his confidential clerk.

"Did you recognise the gentleman who left the house a moment ago?" he asked.

"I cannot be certain," answered the clerk, "but I fancy he is M. Le Comte Desnoëttes, a nobleman who used to visit monsieur years ago in Paris."

"Ah! Very likely. I fancied I knew the face. I thought I had assisted at the funeral of the gentleman's gay career! He tells me he has joined a religious order. Those poor devils often do when they are sold up. That will do, Marot."

Then the pawnbroker fell to examining the trinket which Brother Antoine had left with him. He even tried, by slightly enlarging one of the tiny holes in the scroll work, to catch a glimpse of the small object which his sense of hearing told him was concealed in the cavity of the ring. But in this he was quite unsuccessful, he could see nothing. All he could learn was, that if a precious stone was inside, it must have been wrapped in something to deaden the sound of rattling.

Not daring to break open the ring, Lagrange waited thirty days with the utmost impatience, hoping, almost against hope, that the young lay-brother would find himself unable, or would neglect, to redeem the trinket on the appointed day, and thus suffer it to become his property. He was convinced that the Superior of the Order would not have taken the pains to convey this ring to his brethren when he was in such imminent peril

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unless it contained something of value. Sometimes he felt as if he would give half his fortune to cut the trinket open.

One by one the days went by. Unluckily the month had thirty-one days. M. Lagrange reviled the idiotic arrangement of dividing the months of the year, and waited till the next day. As the afternoon drew to a close he became more anxious, more eager to possess the jewel and its hidden secret. He could not sit at the window. Every man who passed made his heart beat with the fear that it was Brother Antoine come for his ring.

At length Lagrange convinced himself that six o'clock had struck. He locked, and double-locked his door, drew down his blinds, seized an instrument, and in the twinkling of an eye hadcut the ring in two.

A tiny pellet of paper tumbled out.

Carefully and slowly the pawnbroker unrolled it. It was a morsel of very thin paper, closely covered by writing, so fine that it had evidently been written with the point of a pin. The colour was a reddish-brown—the colour of blood when it is dried.

With the help of a magnifying-glass, Lagrange read the secret message which the paper contained, written, of course, in French:

"My children, I die to-morrow, and I send you my blessing. The church plate is in the cistern of our own house, which has a false bottom. But our savings, amounting to nearly four million francs, I caused to be buried in the right-hand corner of the cellar of Jacques Guégan's house in the Rue St. Louis. He knows nothing of this. Courage and hope!—E. C."

Lagrange's fingers trembled, so that the paper fell from them on the desk before him, and his face became pale with excitement.

Four million francs—one hundred and sixty thousand pounds. Lagrange looked at his watch, seized a time-table, and turned over its pages with feverish haste. That night he crossed the Channel.

He could easily understand that the accumulated wealth of the Order of St. Simeon (which numbered many well-born men in its ranks) should reach the sum of four million of francs. And nothing was more probable than that the Superior of the Order should have buried the money in the house of some obscure sympathiser at the time of the siege of Paris. But the fear that haunted M. Lagrange's mind during the tedious midnight journey to Paris was—What if the secret has leaked out? or, What if the money has been accidentally discovered by someone who has had brains enough to hold his tongue? Once or twice the thought crossed his mind that this treasure did not belong to him. The poverty into which the Fathers of St. Simeon had fallen was probably due to the loss of this treasure, coupled with their expulsion from French territory. But M. Lagrange silenced his conscience with a growl. He had not carried on the trade of a money-lender in London for twenty years without being able to do that.

Having arrived in Paris, Lagrange sought out the Rue St. Louis, and found Guégan's house without much difficulty. It was a small, mean-looking place, hardly bigger than a cottage. Guégan was a shoemaker in a small way of business.

Lagrange paved the way diplomatically by ordering a pair of shoes, and then asked the shoemaker whether he had any cellars to let.

"Cellars! my faith, no!" answered the man of the lapstone. "The only cellar I have is paved with earth, but two metres either way. How could I let that? What do you want it for?"

Lagrange saw that he had made a blunder.

"I want it for a—a—store-place. But you are right. It is too small. I should need the lower flat also. Perhaps you would let the house?"

"Well—I have not thought of that," said the shoemaker, with a suspicious glance at his customer.

"What do you say to forty francs a month?"

"Not enough."

"But I should only occupy it a week."

Lagrange could have bitten his tongue off as these words escaped him, for he saw that they had roused the landlord's suspicions effectually.

It was in vain that he offered a higher and higher rent; the very fact of his being willing to pay a month's rent for a week's occupation of the premises seemed to make Guégan determined to refuse to let the place at all.

Lagrange saw that he would have to purchase the house out and out. Well, what did it matter? he said to himself. He could sell it again. The cottage and garden might be worth ten thousand francs.

"Would Guégan sell the house?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the shoemaker, with a grin. "What would the gentleman give?"

"I'll give you ten thousand francs down," said Lagrange.

The man darted a keen look at the stranger, shook his head, and calmly went on with his work.

"Eleven thousand—twelve thousand?"

"No."

Then Lagrange stopped. He saw that he must affect carelessness, or he would never get the house at all, and curtly saying, "Twelve thousand is too much; good-day," he abruptly left the shop.

But he could not rest for a moment. What if that horrid old man, who knew that the cellar was the centre of the eccentric stranger's interest, took it into his head to dig there in the meantime? Lagrange went to the Paris correspondents of his London bankers and provided himself with the equivalent of three thousand pounds. Then he provided himself with a notary, and, accompanied by this functionary, went back to the Rue St. Louis.

The old man proved a tougher customer than he had been before. He evidently saw that Lagrange had set his heart on buying, and he ran up the price till the pawnbroker, in despair, offered the man seventy-five thousand francs—the whole of his three thousand pounds. This was accepted; and that very afternoon the deeds were signed.

Lagrange, trembling with excitement, remained in the house during the rest of the day, and towards evening the shoemaker, having pocketed his money, went for a van and went off with his belongings.

Then the treasure-seeker set to work with pick and shovel, and dug deep into the solid earth—dug till the sweat poured from his brow, till his arms ached, till the walls of the house threatened to fall down and bury him.

If M. Lagrange could have peeped into the next street, and seen Guégan and the pretended lay-brother with a bottle of brandy between them, dividing, with many a joke and burst of laughter, the three thousand pounds which he had paid for the tumble-down cottage, he would have left off digging sooner.

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FACING DEATH

ARRESTED, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged for murder—that is, the law called it murder. The prisoner had thought it all over many times, and he couldn't see that it was murder. He had taken up a stray mule. The owner came along and refused to pay the trifling sum demanded for expenses.

There was a fight, of course, and when mountaineers fight they mean to kill each other. He killed the owner of the mule. What was there wrong about that? Didn't he receive five knife wounds in the man's efforts to kill him? Wasn't it kill or be killed?

And why should they arrest him and confine him in gaol? He had no idea of going away. Why should he go? And why must he have a lawyer, and a jury, and a trial lasting four days when he could have told the judge all about it in five minutes? He summed up the whole case in his quaint, ignorant way when he rose in reply to the formal query, and said:

"Why, Jedge, I reckon they want to hang me, but doggone if I kin see what I've done to desarve it."

He received the sentence with a puzzled look on his face. Why put off its execution two months? It seems foolish to wait beyond a day to hang a man who had been sentenced to die on the gallows. He knew every man on the jury, and he couldn't understand why they were all down on him.

There were men who had slept in his cabin, eaten at his table, and hunted over the mountains with him, and the idea that they should bring in a verdict of guilty astounded him. It wasn't neighbourly. It wasn't doing as they would be done by. The gaoler tried to console him, but was waved aside with the exclamation:

"Don't, George! My head is so full of this fussin' around that I can't stand any more. Jest think of it! They called it murder, and ar' gwine to hang me for it!"

Twenty-four hours later he was imperturbable—stoical—as cool and calm as a man sitting at his own fireside. It had become clear to him that he was to die. It wasn't that he deserved it, and he could scarcely recall an incident of the trial, but he had to die, and that ended the matter for him.

He differed from an Indian only in the colour of his skin. One day his wife was admitted to see him. She had said to one of her neighbours:

"So they-uns ar' gwine to hang my Tom?"

"Yes, reckon he'll just hang."

"Shoo! 'Pears like a right smart of fussin' over nothin'. Tom had ter do it."

"Reckon he had."

"Reckon I orter go down and see he-un."

"Yes, I reckon yo' had."

"Then I will."

And one day, after a walk of twelve miles over the mountain roads, she arrived at the gaol and quietly remarked: "You-uns has got my Tom locked up yere."

"Yes."

"And he-un is to be hung purty soon?"

"Yes."

"Shoo! How triflin'! Reckon I'd better step in and see he-un fur a bit."

They brought him out of his cell into the corridor. He advanced and sat down beside the woman as if at their own doorstep, and she glanced all around her before saying:

"Heap better place than our old cabin, Tom?"

"Yes, heaps better, and good eatin'. How's the crops git on?"

"Mighty pore, Tom. Reckon that co'n never will be knee deep, and them taters is all dried up in the ground."

"Reckon yo'll git along somehow, arter all."

"Bound to, Tom—bound to. Doan't you-un worry 'bout me 'tall. What they-uns gwine to hang you fur?"

"Fur that killin', yo' know."

"Shoo! Yo' had ter do it."

"Of co'se."

"That yere Sam Andrews was just a-slicin' of yo' ter dawgmeat."

"Of co'se."

"Cut yo' mighty bad afore yo' did fur him."

"I showed 'em the cuts."

"But they-uns ar' gwine to hang yo'-un jest the same, eh?"

"Jest the same."

"How triflin'! Waal, Tom, what yo'un gwine to do 'bout it?"

"Jest hang, I reckon."

"Hain't gwine ter raise no fuss?"

"How kin I?"

They sat side by side, staring at the cell door across the corridor, for three or four minutes without another word. Then she said:

"Yo'r brother Jim will kill Bill Andrews, in co'se?"

"In co'se," he replied.

"And I'll shute, if I kin find the chance."

"Fur shoo. Reckon yo'd best cl'ar 'em all out, wimin and all."

"Yes, reckon I had. Gwine ter talk when they-uns hangs you, Tom?"

"Reckon not, I never did like talkin'."

"Reckon I'd best cum down that day."

"Do as yo' mind, but I reckon folks might talk."

"Yes, reckon they would. Reckon I'd best stay home. Gwine ter say any mo' to me, Tom?"

"Skassly. Doggone mean to hang me!"

"So 'tis, but they-uns is determined, I reckon. Mebbe I'll cum down next week—mebbe not."

"Jest as yo' mind. Gwine home now?"

"Yes, gwine right back. Good-bye, Tom."

"Good-bye, Linda."

Not a tear—not a kiss—not a handshake. It was their way. It was born in the flesh. She did not come again. When he was taken out to suffer death before a crowd of two thousand people he did not look about as if hoping to see her face once again.

She seemed to have gone out of his memory entirely. He did not even take a farewell glance at earth and sky. He just died—that was all. He was there to die, and he died. It might as well have been a log of wood at the end of the rope.

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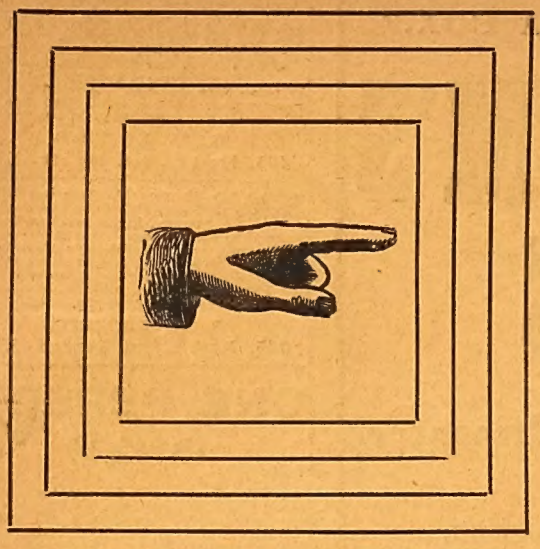

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Recent Testimonials.

Mrs. Hendry, writing from South Shields, states: "Infantina's Syrup has done my children a world of good; in fact, I should not like to be without it."

"Gentlemen,—I consider Infantina's Syrup a most satisfactory medicine for children. Mine are so fond of it that I have to lock the bottle away from them. There certainly is no trouble in getting them to take it. I have given it to three children—three, seven, and twelve years of age—and I can truthfully say it has made new children of them.—Yours sincerely, Caroline Cross."

"Gentlemen,—I can speak most highly of Infantina's Syrup for delicate children. My daughter, I fear, inherited a delicate chest from her grandfather, who died of Consumption. Your Syrup has quite stopped her cough, and she has really commenced to get fat. No other medicine seemed to do her any lasting good. She finds it so pleasant to take that she looks forward to each dose.—Faithfully yours, Mary Knight."

"Dear Sirs,—"I have found Infantina's Syrup a wonderfully strengthening medicine for children. I had no idea that a tonic would do so much for a delicate child. My little child has picked up marvellously since taking it.—Sincerely yours, Eveline Hodge."

"Gentlemen,—Infantina's Syrup has been a blessing to me. I was quite alarmed about my youngest boy's health; he seemed to eat less and grow weaker every day. I have only given him two bottles, and it has quite changed the child; you would scarcely know it is the same boy.—Yours truly, Mrs. Jane Field."

Sold by Chemists and Patent Medicine Vendors, at 1s. 1½d. per bottle. If you cannot obtain it promptly remit 15 penny stamps to the Infantina Company, 6, Sloane Square, London, S.W., and it will be instantly sent post paid. Full instructions accompany each bottle.

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